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REPORT OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE CONSULTATIVE FORUM ON THE PREPARATORY PROCESS FOR THE THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Geneva, 11 April 2000

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CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
	Introduction	1 - 3	3
I.	Progress in the preparatory process for the Conference	4 - 23	3
II.	Issues raised during the discussions	24 - 27	7
III.	Conclusions and recommendations	28 - 33	9

ANNEXES

I.	Agenda	11
II.	List of documents	12
III.	Participation	13

INTRODUCTION

1. The second meeting of the Consultative Forum on the Preparatory Process for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) was held in Geneva on 11 April 2000. It was a follow-up to the first meeting, held in Geneva on 22 July 1999.

2. The **Executive Secretary of the Third United Nations Conference on the LDCs (LDC-III), Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka**, opened the meeting on behalf of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD.

3. The meeting adopted the agenda as proposed by the Conference secretariat (see annex I).

I. PROGRESS IN THE PREPARATORY PROCESS FOR THE CONFERENCE

4. For its consideration of the substantive agenda items, the meeting had before it three documents: a briefing note on the preparatory process for the Conference, which included a number of annexes containing the report of the Regional Expert-Level Preparatory Meeting for the English-Speaking African LDCs, the report of the Regional Expert-Level Preparatory Meeting for the Asian and Pacific LDCs and Guidelines for the Preparation of the Programme of Action at Country Level; a note on contributions by organizations and agencies to the preparatory process for the Conference; and the draft report of the Second Inter-Agency Meeting of the Preparatory Process for the Conference.

5. The **Executive Secretary** of the Conference stated that the preparatory process at the country level had been launched in 46 LDCs.

6. Following country visits by members of the UNCTAD secretariat, National Preparatory Committees (NPCs) had been established and Local Resource Persons (LRPs) appointed to provide substantive support to these Committees. Three regional coordinators had also been appointed to provide substantive support to the NPCs and the LRPs. In addition, LDCs had been encouraged to establish, where they did not yet exist, Local Development Partners Forums (LDPFs) composed of bilateral and multilateral development partners on the one hand and the Government and other stakeholders on the other.

7. The European Union (EU) had facilitated the country-level preparations by providing a grant of ECU 80,000 for each LDC. However, it now appeared that these resources were available only to LDCs who were members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of States, and the speaker expressed particular concern about securing finance for non-ACP LDCs. Nevertheless, the aid available so far had proved critical in providing momentum and assisting country-level preparations. In addition, some local United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Offices had expressed their willingness to provide support to the country-level preparatory process, and bilateral and other donors represented in LDCs were being encouraged to do likewise through the NPCs.

8. She expressed the hope that some LDCs would be able to submit the first drafts of their country programmes of action by mid-June 2000 to enable the secretariat to distribute these documents to member States so that they could be discussed at the first meeting of the

Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee, to be held in New York from 24 to 28 July 2000 in accordance with United Nations General Assembly resolution 52/187. Those LDCs that would, for practical reasons, not be able to present a draft programme of action at that meeting were expected to submit at least a review of the results of their programme of action for the 1990s.

9. The challenge facing the management of the preparatory process was how to ensure that the country-level programmes of action would indeed become a framework for coordinating international support to the LDCs in the next 10 years. In her view, this issue had been foreseen by the General Assembly, which in paragraph 6 of its resolution 53/182 "called upon the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank to link the forthcoming round-table and consultative group meetings to the preparatory process of the Conference, and to ensure that they make substantive contributions to the Conference". It was important to give operational content to this recommendation.

10. With regard to preparations at the regional level, she stated that two expert-level preparatory meetings had been held - the first in Addis Ababa for English-speaking African LDCs and the second in Kathmandu for Asian and Pacific LDCs. The third meeting - for the French-speaking African LDCs and Haiti - was scheduled to be held in Niamey, Niger, from 18 to 20 April 2000. In addition the Conference secretariat in cooperation with the regional economic commissions would organize regional high-level preparatory events during the preparatory process. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was planning a special event on the substantive issues for the Conference, to be held in Addis Ababa in November 2000 on the occasion of the meeting of the Ministers of Finance and Planning. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was preparing similar events. The UNCTAD secretariat would make every effort to solicit the active participation of subregional economic groupings in the preparatory process for the Conference.

11. With regard to the global level, she emphasized the critical importance of advocacy and publicity. There was a need to mobilize greater public awareness and support in donor countries for the LDCs if the Conference was to agree new concessions for the latter. Much groundwork had to be done to reach the public, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media and so forth. This required a clearly defined division of labour among all those responsible for the preparation of the Conference. Initiatives had to be taken at the national level in all LDCs as well as in their development partners.

12. Referring to the substantive agenda of LDC-III, she stated that although the Conference would deal with all the development problems facing LDCs, there was a need to focus on priorities and on the critical bottlenecks. In this regard, while country-level programmes of action would indicate national-level priorities, the global agenda should be centred on achieving two goals. The first of these was to induce those countries that had not honoured commitments agreed to at previous global conferences to do so. The second was to secure additional concessions for LDCs in order to assist their efforts to integrate into the global economy in a beneficial manner. Such concessions might involve, for example, granting bound duty-free and quota-free market access for all products exported from LDCs.

13. Concerning progress related to resource mobilization for the preparation of the Conference, she stated that despite concerted efforts by the secretariat, few donors had responded

to the call for funds. So far, support had been secured from the EU, which had in principle granted ECU 80,000 for each LDC, although, as already mentioned, practical arrangements for accessing those funds had proved problematic for non-ACP LDCs. These problems need to be sorted out urgently. Other donors that have pledged support included the Netherlands, about $900,000; Belgium, $250,000; Finland, about $350,000; Italy, $100,000; and Sweden, about $500,000. A private firm based in Zurich - A&P Partners - had pledged $100,000. Since a total of about $16.9 million was required, the pledges made so far amounted to only one third of that sum. She took the opportunity to thank all those that had responded to the appeal, and she urged other donors to provide assistance as soon as possible.

14. The representative of **Bangladesh**, speaking on behalf of the LDCs, emphasized the importance of the country-level preparations for elaborating a tangible global programme of action at LDC-III. The national preparatory process should be demand-driven and nationally owned. There was a need to maintain a high quality of country programmes, but this might be difficult in view of the fact that the programmes had to be submitted by 16 June 2000. He was concerned that the Asian and Pacific LDCs not members of the ACP group would not benefit from the financial assistance provided by the EU for country-level preparations. This problem should be resolved as soon as possible in order to avoid further delay. He noted that he had chaired the expert-level preparatory meeting for the Asian and Pacific LDCs held in Kathmandu from 3 to 5 April 2000. The expert-level meetings considered and adopted guidelines for the preparation of country-level programmes of action. He stressed that the guidelines were not meant to be a straitjacket, but to ensure that the country-level preparations were of a high quality in terms of their content and presentation. It was obvious that the priorities for action would depend on country needs and requirements. He said that the UNCTAD secretariat should, first, help individual LDCs to prepare their country memoranda; secondly, assist them in formulating a common strategy; and thirdly, service the Third LDC Conference. In his view, the Permanent Missions in Geneva should be involved in the work of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee through expanded bureau and related activities between the first and second meetings of the Committee. Also, the UNCTAD secretariat should provide substantive inputs to the Preparatory Committee. He raised some practical problems that required urgent answers, including how to induce the private sector to be associated with the preparatory process, to what extent were the country programmes going to be owned by LDCs, and their status vis-à-vis existing national plans of action.

15. The representative of the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, stated that his group fully supported the preparatory process and the Third LDC Conference itself, which was expected to adopt policy measures and actions designed to overcome the structural constraints faced by the LDCs. Recalling his group's support during the first and second Conferences on LDCs, he stated that the Group of 77 and China would spare no effort to ensure that LDC-III reaffirmed the principle of shared responsibility and strengthened partnership for growth and development. In that respect, he noted that the innovation of shifting the focus of attention to country-level preparations was of great importance, since that would help to address critical issues facing many LDCs, including the agricultural sector, diversification of LDCs' economies through industrialization, socio-economic infrastructure development, reinforcement of science and technology in LDCs, and

human resources development. Taking the example of the recent disasters in Mozambique and Ethiopia, the speaker emphasized the need for urgent action to be taken by the international community, given the vulnerability of LDCs to natural disasters.

16. He concluded by emphasizing the fact that, in the light of the experience with the two previous Conferences, effective follow-up and monitoring mechanisms were crucial for success in implementing the outcomes of the Conference. He also emphasized the important role that economic cooperation among developing countries could play in strengthening LDCs' capacities in various fields. In this context, he referred to the offer of market access made by some developing countries at the High-Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for Least Developed Countries' Trade Development held by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in October 1997.

17. The representative of **Portugal**, speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the EU's hosting of the Third LDC Conference in Brussels demonstrated its concern about the plight of the LDCs in the face of the negative effects of globalization. In this connection, the EU welcomed the Consultative Forum, which provided opportunity for discussion of new strategies and appropriate plans of action. He believed that it was imperative to demonstrate a coherence of policy at both the national and international levels. This coherence would serve as a conduit to facilitate the political will to attain poverty eradication goals.

18. He emphasized that the preparatory process had to be inclusive and transparent. All parties, including the United Nations, its specialized agencies, donors, LDC Governments, NGOs and the Bretton Woods institutions, particularly the World Bank, had an important responsibility and an important role to play. There were urgent questions before the LDC Conference, and it was vital to combine efforts when examining development issues so as to provide the maximum benefits to the citizens involved. These issues included education, health, environment, food security, drug trafficking and consumption, and debt cancellation efforts. The EU was committed to assisting LDCs in these areas. To ensure effectiveness, it should provide practical solutions for improving the status of LDCs. The current partnership agreement between the EU and LDCs was a mechanism that would promote global development policies, and that was to be commended.

19. He stressed the importance of good governance, human rights, democracy, the rule of law and the fight against corruption. These were preconditions for development, since democracy and development were not incompatible aims. The EU was deeply committed to the process of assisting LDCs' integration into the world economy. This commitment had been expressed at the UNCTAD X Conference, and the EU wished to reiterate it. He believed that the LDC Conference should go beyond reflections and aim at promoting significant progress in each of the countries concerned. The EU attached great importance to the Conference and believed it would provide an opportunity to reinforce in a complementary manner ongoing and future actions in favour of the LDCs.

20. The representative of the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development**, speaking as a member of the Secretariat (Development Cooperation Directorate) and not as a spokesperson for the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), provided an update of the work currently being undertaken. He said that the DAC High Level Meeting of Ministers responsible for development cooperation and Heads of Agencies to be convened on 11-12 May

would discuss matters which were relevant to the LDC Conference. Issues on the agenda would include poverty reduction; partnership strategies; country-level frameworks; policy coherence; quantity, quality and catalytic uses of ODA; private flows; debt sustainability and the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative; the new international financial architecture and global public goods. Together with the Development Cooperation 1999 Report (issued in February 2000) and a seminar on "Development Finance - the Way Forward" held on 29-30 March 2000, these discussions would shape OECD and members' inputs to the 2000 United Nations High Level Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development (FFD) as well as the LDC Conference. He emphasized the importance of fostering a linkage between the FFD Event (now foreseen as early as June 2000) and the Conference.

21. The representative of the **European Commission** reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to cooperate fully with UNCTAD in order to ensure a successful Conference. The Commission would like to discuss with UNCTAD and settle at an early date all matters related to facilities and logistics for the Conference. Since the holding of the Conference at the European Parliament Building was itself symbolic, it was desirable to involve parliamentarians and political leaders in one of the events to be organized. Concerning funds for the Liaison Committee for Development NGOs to the European Union, he said that the matter was under consideration.

22. The representative of the **Liaison Committee for Development NGOs to the European Union** reaffirmed its commitment to act as a focal point for organizing the NGO Forum in Brussels before and during the Conference. He believed that the Forum should facilitate and support NGO advocacy work, build consensus in the NGO sector and raise public awareness about the Conference. He considered the NGO advocacy role important in generating public support for increased levels of official development assistance (ODA) to LDCs. With regard to modalities for activities to prepare the Conference, he stated that an NGO steering group made up of European NGO networks and Belgian NGO umbrella organizations had been established. Its first meeting, to discuss the division of labour, had taken place recently. He also stated that in order to attract large numbers of NGO participants at the NGO Forum, his organization's Annual Assembly would be held back to back with the LDC Conference.

23. The representative of the **International Chamber of Commerce** said that although her organization had not yet contributed to the preparatory process, it stood ready to make a contribution. She referred to ongoing work in connection with preparation and dissemination of Investment Guides. These had been prepared for Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Mali, and Uganda, and the aim was to cover all 48 LDCs. She also mentioned the extensive ICC network which could be mobilized, as there were local committees in many LDCs. She suggested that one way of reaching the business community to inform it about the Third LDC Conference would be to make use of the forthcoming ICC Conference to be held in Nigeria this year.

II. ISSUES RAISED DURING THE DISCUSSIONS

24. The statements and discussions on the substantive agenda items, namely progress in the preparatory process at the country, regional and global levels, consideration of organizational

and substantive issues related to the Conference, and consultations between the Conference secretariat and Forum members on resource mobilization for the preparatory process, raised the following issues:

- Concern that time was running out for LDCs to present country programmes by 15 June 2000;

- Whether the process at the country level ensured ownership of country programmes;

- The relationship between the preparatory process and ongoing planning exercises and development initiatives involving bilateral and multilateral development partners at the national level;

- Whether NGOs and civil society were adequately involved in the preparatory process;

- Whether country programmes would be part of the Global Programme.

25. In response, the Executive Secretary stated that:

- It was not expected that all LDCs would submit their preliminary country programmes by June 2000. But, as a minimum, each of them would be expected to provide an assessment of the results of its programme of action during the 1990s;

- The National Preparatory Committees ensured the participation not only of different government departments but also of civil society, NGOs, the private sector, academia, the media, etc.;

- The country programmes of action should, in her view, inform the formulation of the Global Programme of Action;

- The country programme of action should draw on and reflect priorities contained in existing national plans (annual/multi-year) and sectoral programmes and initiatives, and would constitute a cohesive development framework for the next 10 years, providing a basis for resource mobilization for that period.

26. The exchange of views with regard to preparations at regional and global levels touched on the following issues:

- To ensure that the preparatory process and the Conference itself were complementary to, and not parallel with, other conferences;

- The need to focus the launching of the preparatory process on raising awareness and generating support in donor countries to enable their representatives to make commitments;

- The need to mobilize resources for the preparatory process, these to be made available before it is too late;

- A request for a breakdown of the budget for the preparation of the Conference;

- A request for information regarding the involvement of NGOs (in LDCs and development partners);

- The extent to which parliaments/political leaders were involved in the preparatory process;

- Whether the LDC Conference would be superfluous in view of the many sectoral conferences which had adopted special measures for LDCs.

27. In response, the Executive Secretary stated that:

- The LDC Conference was not superfluous: it would draw on previous conferences, and would coordinate the various supportive actions;

- Preparations in LDCs had to be complemented by increasing awareness and support in development partner countries;

- Funds were urgently needed to make good the budgetary shortfall;

- NGO mobilization extended to LDCs;

- Consultations were being held to define the role of political leaders in the context of the Conference.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

28. There was general agreement that the key to a successful Conference and a meaningful outcome in Brussels lay in a preparatory process and country programmes of action that were of a high quality, nationally owned and broad-based.

29. There was a need to focus the preparatory process on raising awareness and generating support in donor countries to enable their representatives to make new commitments at the Conference.

30. The Conference should agree new concessions in favour of LDCs. To secure such concessions, a successful campaign to win the support of the public in donor countries was required. Consequently, there was a need for vigorous advocacy work before the Conference. In this context, the role of NGOs was emphasized.

31. Since the Conference was a United Nations conference, all agencies of the United Nations system had a vital role to play in ensuring its success. Their respective roles and contributions needed to be determined through regular bilateral and multilateral consultations.

32. There was an urgent need for adequate resources to finance the preparatory process and the Conference. Donors that had not yet made contributions were urged to do so without delay.

33. The third meeting of the Consultative Forum would be held back to back with the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Preparatory Committee, which was due to take place in New York, from 24 to 28 July 2000.

ANNEX I

Agenda

10.00 - 10.10	Welcoming remarks by Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Executive Secretary, LDC-III
10.10 - 10.15	Adoption of the Agenda of the Meeting
10.15 - 12.00	Statement by the Executive Secretary of the Conference on the progress in the preparatory process for the Conference – Statement by the representatives of LDCs – Statement by the Chairman of the Group of 77 in Geneva – Statement by the representative of the European Union/EC – Followed by other EU representatives wishing to take the floor – Statement by a DAC representative – Statement by Liaison Committee for Development NGOs to the European Union (Focal point for NGO Forum)
12.00 - 13.00	Exchange of views on the progress in the preparatory process at the country, regional and global levels
14.30 - 16.00	Consideration of organizational and substantive issues related to the Conference - Report from the Second Inter-Agency Meeting on LDC-III and discussion
16.00 - 17.30	Consultations between Conference secretariat and Forum members on resource mobilization for the preparatory process – Finalization of the draft report
17.30 - 18.00	Consideration and adoption of the report of the Meeting
18.00	Closure of Meeting

ANNEX II

List of documents

1. Briefing note on the preparatory process for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

2. Draft report of the Second Inter-Agency Meeting on the Preparatory Process for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

3. Note verbale

4. Note on contributions by organizations and agencies to the preparatory process for the Conference

5. Draft agenda

6. The Least Developed Countries 1999 Report (Overview)

7. Statistical synopsis of the least developed countries

ANNEX III

Participation

1. The following States members of UNCTAD were represented at the Meeting:

Bangladesh
Belgium
Canada
Egypt
Finland
France
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Italy
Malaysia
Netherlands
Portugal
Sweden

2. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented at the Meeting:

European Community
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

3. The following specialized agencies and related organizations were represented at the Meeting:

International Labour Organization
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
World Health Organization
World Bank
International Monetary Fund
Universal Postal Union
International Telecommunication Union
World Meteorological Organization
World Intellectual Property Organization
United Nations Industrial Development Organization
International Atomic Energy Agency
World Trade Organization

4. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Non-Governmental Liaison Service, and the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and Least Developed Countries were represented at the Meeting. The International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO was also represented at the Meeting.

5. The following non-governmental organizations were represented at the Meeting:

General Category

Liaison Committee of Development NGOs to the European Union
International Chamber of Commerce